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On

A Critical Study of Universal Religion: Bahá'u'lláh and Swami Vivekananda

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INTRODUCTION:

Religion has been an intrinsic part of human existence since ancient times, ingrained in the very fabric of our being. It has wielded significant influence over human thoughts and actions throughout history, becoming an integral aspect of life. In contemporary cosmopolitan settings, people of diverse religious beliefs find themselves living nearby due to economic and social factors. Fostering harmonious coexistence in our global society necessitates acknowledging and embracing religious diversity, thereby promoting mutual respect and acceptance of various faiths. The importance of the Bahá’u'lláh and Swami Vivekananda's contribution to promoting a Universal Religion is indisputable.

The Baha'i Faith, originating in the mid-19th century and founded by Mīrzā Ḥosayn Alī Nūrī, also known as Bahá’u'lláh, a Persian prophet, asserts his position as the latest in a line of divine messengers, including Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad.[1] Key to Baha'i teachings is the concept of the oneness of humanity, the unity of all religions, and the establishment of a global society grounded in justice and equality.

Swami Vivekananda, instrumental in introducing the Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world, played a pivotal role in the revitalization of Hinduism in India. His renowned address at the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893 in Chicago emphasized the universality of religious experiences and the acceptance of diverse paths to the divine.[2] Vivekananda's teachings aimed to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western thought, advocating for a harmonious coexistence of religions based on shared spiritual principles.

According to Vivekananda, everyone has a religious essence in their spirit and that no one is born into a particular religion. By bringing the Vedas, Bible, and Koran into harmony, he hopes to move humanity past religious divisions. In particular, Vivekananda commends Hinduism—more especially, the Vedanta and Upanishads—for its high conception of human dignity, but he also criticises Hinduism for its hypocrisy in oppressing the weak and destitute. His ultimate

objective is to advance a religion that honours the divinity found in every person and encourages harmony amongst many religious traditions. Vivekananda wants to advance a spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and action-oriented religion. Instead of founding a new religion, his goal is to transform how people view all religions by promoting tolerance, the understanding that everyone is divine, and the realisation of one's own divinity.[3]

The core principles of the Baha'i Faith and the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, explore their perspectives on universal religion and the potential convergence of their ideas. By delving into their writings, speeches, and the historical contexts surrounding their emergence, we aim to uncover the nuanced aspects of their philosophies and evaluate their contributions to the broader discourse on a universal and inclusive approach to spirituality.

PROBLEMS:

This research aims to explore significant topics within the realm of religious studies. It specifically examines aspects such as the emergence and perpetuation of religion. Central questions include: What is the nature of religion? how it originated? What are the factors influencing religion and its various aspects? Such fundamental inquiries are required to critically examine Religion and find out the Universal elements in it.

The issues to be discussed are —

- What is Universal religion?
- Religious conflict and its impact on societies.
- Problem of establishing Universal Religion.
- How can Universal Religion help to society?
- This work is an attempt to explore these questions from the perspective of Bahá’u'lláh and Swami Vivekananda's concepts of Universal religion.

PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

A critical study of universal religions, specifically focusing on the Bahá'í Faith and the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, would require an in-depth exploration of their respective beliefs, philosophies, historical contexts, and impacts on society. Below is a literature review that provides an overview of some key works and themes related to these two spiritual traditions-

1. "The Promise of World Peace" by the Universal House of Justice: This statement by the governing body of the Bahá'í Faith articulates the religion's commitment to global harmony and peace, this is a central theme in Bahá'í teachings.

2. "Swami Vivekananda: A Biography" by Swami Nikhilananda: This biography of Swami Vivekananda offers a detailed account of his life, travels, and teachings, shedding light on his role in popularizing Hindu philosophy in the West.

3. "Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda" edited by Swami Vivekananda: This multi-volume set contains the collected writings and speeches of Swami Vivekananda, allowing readers to explore his thoughts on spirituality, religion, and universalism.

4. "The Baha'i Faith and Hinduism: Comparative Religion and Interreligious Dialogue" by Moojan Momen: This article explores the interactions between the Baha'i Faith and Hinduism, shedding light on points of convergence and divergence.

5. "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna" by Swami Nikhilananda: While this book focuses on Sri Ramakrishna, it offers insights into the broader Vedantic tradition, which greatly influenced Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda's teachings can be understood in the context of Advaita Vedanta, and this book provides a foundational understanding of that philosophy.

6. "Comparative Religion: Its Genesis and Growth" by Louis Henry Jordan: This historical work explores the development of comparative religion as an academic field. It could deliver relevant data for understanding how the ideas of universal religion emerged and evolved.

7. "The World's Religions" by Huston Smith: This classic work offers insights into the major world religions and their potential for contributing to a universal spirituality.

8. "One Common Faith" by the Universal House of Justice: This authoritative document from the Baha'i Faith's governing body explores the idea of a universal religion and the role of the Baha'i Faith in promoting unity among all religions. It is a significant source for understanding the Baha'i perspective.

9. Scholars like Romain Rolland's "The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel" have explored Vivekananda's life and teachings in the context of universal religion.

HYPOTHESIS:

- To critically analyze Universal Religion.
- Philosophical analysis of Baha'i faith.
- To analyze Vivekananda's Concept of Universal Religion.
- To Understand Bahá'u'lláh and Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Universal Religion.

OBJECTIVES:

This research has the following objectives-

1. To know the different religions with the same vision.
2. To critically analyze the Bahá'u'lláh and Swami Vivekananda's concept of Universal Religion.
3. To synthesize the similarities and dissimilarities between Bahá'u'lláh and Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Universal Religion.
4. How Bahá'u'lláh and Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Universal Religion can help society to bring well-being and happiness to mankind.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

During the discussion, several questions were raised. Those are —

1. What does the term 'Religion' refer to?
2. The characteristics and purpose of religion, both on an individual and societal scale.
3. The consequences of religious conflicts and their effects on societies.
4. Is it possible to apply Swami Vivekananda's universal religion in the present day if possible, then how is it possible?
5. How reasonable it is to apply the ideas of the Baha'i Faith to the present day?

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY:

Both primary and secondary sources will be used to fulfill the stated objectives. As –

Primary Sources:

Primary sources will include the information gathered by the interviews and questionaries taken, to know Baha'i faith.

Secondary Sources:

The secondary sources of the research include books, articles, magazines, Journals and Web Searches, etc. And for carrying out the research a critical analysis of these sources will be needed.

RESEARCH TOOLS:

Research tools are essential for conducting efficient and effective studies. The type of data gathered, the purpose of the studies, and the necessary analysis are all influence the choice of tools. In this research I will use Books, Chart, Internet, Computer as tools.

- Books: Provide in-depth information and analysis about a particular subject.
- Internet: The internet gives a lot of information instantly and easily available.
- Computer: Quickly and accurately analyse vast amounts of data using a variety of statistical techniques.
- Chart: Analyzing data, emphasizing a point, or comparing multiple sets of data in a way that is easy to understand and remember.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPOSED WORK:

The proposed research holds great significance as it sheds light on the importance of promoting a universal perspective of religion in today's world, which is increasingly interconnected. The study highlights the need to address prevalent

issues such as violence, hatred, and a crisis of values among people by adopting a universal religion. Embracing the teachings of Bahá’u'lláh and Swami Vivekananda's Dharma becomes paramount in this pursuit. These philosophies emphasize unity, tolerance, and understanding, providing a framework for individuals to connect with a broader sense of humanity and contribute to a more harmonious global society.

LIMITATIONS:

- Opinions may vary when it comes to obtaining information through interviews, and there might be ambiguity in how expressions are conveyed.
- Lack of Time
- Less availability of resources: The availability of primary and secondary sources related to the Bahá'í Faith is very limited.
- Geographical Limitations: Fieldwork may be limited to the location of informants.

FUTURE WORK:

The significance of a universal religion holds great importance for society, as it is a research endeavor that proves valuable not just in the present but also for the future. The ongoing necessity for the education of a universal religion transcends time. Despite varying perspectives on this concept, it remains true that only a universal religion has the posibility to foster the comprehensive development of individuals. Given these considerations, the subject presents abundant possibilities for future research endeavors.

CHAPTERIZATION:

Introduction

Chapter 1: Critical Analysis of Universal Religion

Chapter 2: Bahá'u'lláh And Universal Religion:

Chapter 3: Swami Vivekananda and Universal Religion:

Chapter 4: A Comparative Account of Bahá'u'lláh and Swami Vivekananda

Chapter 5: Bahá'u'lláh and Swami Vivekananda in the Contemporary Society:

Conclusion

INTRODUCTION:

Religion is the multifaceted concept with diverse interpretations across cultures. In India, religion holds a central role, marked by a pluralistic outlook where various traditions coexist. Major religions include Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Islam, each with distinct beliefs and practices emphasizing concepts like dharma, karma, and moksha. Religious practices involve rituals, meditation, pilgrimage, and devotion. Western perspectives, often influenced by Christianity, view religion as a personal matter, focusing on individual faith, salvation, and moral values. Christianity, dominant in the West, centers on Jesus Christ's teachings and monotheism. Western intellectual discourse explores topics such as God's existence, faith and reason, religious morality, and religion's societal role. Both contexts exhibit diversity, highlighting religion's subjective nature.

- **Chapter-1**

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF UNIVERSAL RELIGION:

The concept of a "universal religion" envisions an idealized belief system that transcends specific religious traditions, uniting humanity across cultural and ideological differences. It proposes common moral principles and spiritual teachings applicable to all. Throughout history, scholars have debated

approaches, including synthesizing existing traditions or creating a new system. However, the theoretical nature of this idea is evident, given the deep cultural roots and diversity of existing religions worldwide. While efforts in interfaith dialogue and tolerance contribute to peaceful coexistence, creating a singular universal religion remains complex and challenging.

- **Chapter- 2**

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND UNIVERSAL RELIGION:

The Baha'i Faith advocates for a universal religion fostering the unity of humanity. According to Baha'i teachings, major religions represent progressive revelations from God, each contributing to spiritual development. Baha'is believe in Messengers such as Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, and Baha'u'llah, who founded the faith. These Messengers offered teachings tailored to their times, forming a connected spiritual foundation. Key Baha'i principles include the oneness of God, unity of religions, unity of humanity, elimination of prejudice, equality of genders, harmony of science and religion, and the pursuit of a just and peaceful world order. Baha'is consider Baha'u'llah the latest Messenger, emphasizing unity, justice, and global collaboration. The Baha'i Faith encourages independent truth investigation, promotes unity among diverse populations, and strives for societal improvement.

- **Chapter- 3**

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND UNIVERSAL RELIGION:

Swami Vivekananda, the renowned Indian philosopher and spiritual leader, did not advocate for a specific "universal religion." Instead, he emphasized the unity of all religions, promoting religious harmony and tolerance. Vivekananda believed that all religions share fundamental principles aimed at guiding humanity toward spiritual growth. He viewed religion not as rigid dogmas but as a means to access deeper spiritual truths present in all traditions. Vivekananda encouraged respect for and learning from various religious paths, emphasizing the universality of

spiritual experiences. He urged individuals to transcend religious differences, embracing the common essence of all faiths, and stressed the importance of direct personal experience over external rituals or doctrines.

- **Chapter- 4**

A COMPARATIVE ACCOUNT OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA:

Swami Vivekananda and Bahá'u'lláh share common ground in their emphasis on the unity of humanity and the universality of religious principles. Both advocate for mutual respect among diverse faiths, viewing them as different paths or stages leading to the same ultimate truth or spiritual evolution. However, they differ in their foundations and perspectives. Vivekananda's teachings, rooted in Hindu philosophy, center on concepts like Vedanta and Yoga, while the Bahá'í Faith stands as an independent religion with its distinct scriptures and messengers. While similarities exist, it's crucial to recognize the unique aspects and historical contexts that shape each philosophy. Vivekananda's ideas emerge from Hindu philosophy, while the Bahá'í Faith represents a distinct religious system with its own beliefs and practices.

- **Chapter- 5**

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY:

Swami Vivekananda and Bahá'u'lláh both have a role in the era of globalization. They promote universal values, emphasize how we are all connected, and advocate for social justice. Additionally, they envision a world that values diversity and fosters unity. Their teachings can help people and communities become more peaceful and work together better in our global society.

CONCLUSION:

The ongoing discourse on religious pluralism holds significant importance in contemporary discussions. While the past century has seen philosophical debates surrounding the idea of a universal religion, the imperative now is to actualize this concept in practical terms. In our world marked by cultural and religious diversity, the applicability of Swami Vivekananda's notion of universal religion and the principles embodied in the Baha'i Faith becomes increasingly crucial. Their vision of a universal religion extends beyond the confines of specific belief systems, inviting not only adherents of various faiths but also non-believers to participate. Central to their ideology is the foundational principle of the oneness of humanity, making it a compelling and desirable framework for fostering unity in our global society in the 21st century.

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